Vol. II. Numb. 90.

THE OBSERVATOR.

On Her Majesties Order concerning the Play-House.

From **Saturday** February the 12th, to **Wednesday** February the 16th, 17o¼.

Country-m. MAster *Observator*, you promised to give us your Opinion on Her Majesties Order for Reforming the Abuses and Disorders of the Stage, which as Her Majesty says has justly given Offence. Truly I heartily rejoyce at these Restrictions laid on the *Devils-Chappels*, that the Great and Holy Name of the most high God shall be no more Prophaned in these Seminaries of Vice, and Sinks of Wickedness; this is the best Omen of Success that has been visible since Her Majesties Happy Accession to the Throne.

Obs. 'Tis a good Step indeed towards the *Reformation of Manners*, the Out-works of Satan are taken by Storm, and the Citadel is forc'd to Capitulate: How well they will perform the Articles is another Question, but there are Guards set upon them to observe their Motions. *Nemo repente fuit Bonus.* A Man is not soon reduced from a Habit of Sin and Wickedness to a State of Vertue and Piety, much less Assemblies of Impious Persons, who plead Priviledge and Custom: We found in the late Dreadful Storm the Aged and Sturdy Oaks pluck'd up by the Violence of the Winds, when the two Trees of Sin and Iniquity, in *Drury-Lane* and *Lincolns-Inn-Field*, remained unshaken, and those Impious Wretches who take shelter under the Covert of their Boughs, with a daring Boldness, by Acting the Play the very next Evening, did affront Heaven it self, and Ridiculed the Power of him, that holds the Winds in the hollow of his Hand, before whose Presence the Earth doth shake, and the Mountains do tremble. It is now hoped, since Her Majesty has been Graciously pleased for the Honour of God and the *Protestant Religion*, to cut off the *Exuberant* Branches of these Trees of Lewdness, that God will yet farther Inspire Her with *Christian Courage* to lay the Ax of *Justice* to their Root, and bring them Level with the Ground, cutting them down as Trees that bear the Fruits of *Sin* and *Impiety*, which cumber the Earth and hinder the Growth of Noble, Generous, and Vertuous Plants. It much rejoyced me when I heard, that so many of our Right Reverend the Bishops, and others the Reverend Clergy of this Kingdom, in their Sermons on the last *Fast-Day*, so Earnestly insisted on the *Impious Practices* of the Stage; a thing truly worthy of their Notice; even the Ministers themselves are Introduced, speaking after an *Impious* and *Obscene* manner, as I lately shew'd you in one of the Plays Acted at the *Theatre*: These are the *Forts* and *Sconces*, whereon Vice has mounted its Cannons to batter down the Church; these are the *Asylums*, the places of Refuge, whither the Deserters from the Church repair for Protection, where they set up their Standards of Vice, and list the Enemies of *Religion* and *Vertue* into the Devils Service: Considering the *Promptitude* of Humane Nature to Sin, 'tis a Wonder, and at the same Time a special Blessing, that *Religion* has any *Votaries*, that our Churches have any *Assemblys*, when the Doors of the Chappels of *Vice* stand open to all Comers.

What Mr. *Collier* has Written in Relation to the Stage, I think Unanswerable, and I wish his, or some other good Pen, was Employ'd in this Question, *viz. Whether Plays, Interludes, Masks, Farces and other Theatrical Diversions, are not Sinful in themselves, Inconsistent with the true Practice of Godliness, and not to be Tollerated in a Christian Protestant Country?*

Country-m. Truly, Master *Observator*, this is a Necessary and Pertinent Question, shall I beg the Favour of you, to give us your Answer to it; I hope it may tend to the Edification of the Company, and I am sure not to your own Detriment, for you are not one whit lessened in the Esteem of Good Men, since the Players brought you on the Stage in that Foolish Nonsensical Prologue.

Obs. I value not the Reproaches of the Greatest Ill Man in the Kingdom, nay their Ill Word is my *Honour* and *Credit*. But you have put a Task upon me worthy the Labours of a *Divine*, and I wish some such Person would clear up this Point. However I shall give you my Opinion, which may serve till better comes.

There are none, I suppose, will positively affirm that frequenting of Plays is a Duty; but I do positively affirm, That whatsoever is not a Duty, enjoyned either by Humane or Divine Laws, is a Sin. Now that Plays are not enjoyned by Divine Laws, is evident from the *Scriptures*; and that they are Condemn'd by Humane Laws, is proved from our own Acts, as well as the Statute Law of the *Romans*.

The Laws of our Ancestors were all concluded in *Utile & Bonum*, such as were Profitable and good for the *Common-Wealth*, as they had respect to the Government of Men; whose Actions were also concluded in *Utile & Bonum*, for the Advantage and Good of themselves and Posterity; for the Safety of the Realm, for the Honour of God, and the Credit of Religion, to none of which things Plays have the least Tendency.

All Humane Actions are either Natural, Divine or Moral; to see Plays is no Natural Action, 'tis no Divine or Moral Action; and whatsoever are contrary to these, are Sinful Actions.

The Question from hence arises, is, Whether Plays are not Indifferent in themselves, and have no Tendency to the Corruption of *Good Manners?*

We'll suppose this to be true, and that according to Her Majesties Pious Order in the *Gazette*, the Plays may be Regulated and Reformed from that abundance of Blasphemy and Immorality at present contained in them; yet as long as they are *Stumbling-Blocks*, and do give Offence to the *Godly*, they are not to entertained: For the Restraining the Licentiousness of Plays, is like putting a Muzzle on a Mastiff, which thro' the negligence of those that look after him, may in time drop off, and he again proceed to Worry the Neighbourhood; the sinks of Sin ought to be damn'd up,

up, the *Perches* of *Unclean Birds* ought to be taken down; nay, the very footsteps of Vice ought to be wash'd away; the Synagogues of Satan ought to be so entirely Demolished, as not to leave One *Stone*; and their very Memory to be Buried in *Eternal Oblivion*.

'Tis true, the *Christian Religion* does not enjoyn such Austerities on its Professors, as to deny them Innocent *Recreations*; such as may tend to the Health, either of Body or Mind, and better fit them for the Service of their *Maker*; for which end we eat, we drink, we live; now it lies upon these, who do assert the Lawfulness of *Theatrical Recreations*, to prove, that they any way answer this End; for if they do not, they are *Unchristian Sports*, and *Pernicious Pastimes*.

No good *Christian* ought to undertake any Enterprize, or do a thing, on which he cannot pray to God for a Blessing? Can any one Pray for the Divine Assistance in seeing of Plays, or desire God to protect him in the Houses of Iniquity? We are limited even in our Prayers, in respect to those things we Pray for: We may Positively Pray for Grace, and all Spiritual Blessings, because, without them, no One can see God in Glory; but for Temporal Blessings, Health and Wealth, and other Comforts of Humane Life, We can Pray but Conditionally, if it be for the Honour and Glory of God, who is the Sole Judge in this Case: Now under which of these Heads do Plays come? Does the seeing of them tend to the Glory and Honour of our Creator? Can we Pray for a Blessing in the use of them? Have they been ever the Ordinary means to any thing, but the Ruin of Souls? Surely no.

Some things which are Innocent in themselves, may, by the Abuse of them, become *Sinful*; and then the use of them ought to be prohibited. Things in *Religion* which have for a long Time been approved, when they have been abused to Superstition, have been abolished. The *Brazen Serpent* which *Moses* set up in the Wilderness, was no less than a Type or Shadow of our Saviour *Jesus Christ*, and seeing it had wrought such Miraculous and extraordinary Cures on the Bodies of the *Israelites*, that were bitten by the fiery *Flying Serpents*, The Idolatrous *Israelites* Offered Incense unto it. And tho' this *Serpent* was set up by *Moses* according to the Express Command of the *Almighty* himself, yet we find the Spirit of God in the 18*th*, 2 *Kings*, Commending *Hezechiah*, for that he *Brake in pieces the* Brazen Serpent, *that* Moses *had made*; *for unto those Days the Children of* Israel *did burn Incense unto it*.

Now if these things which are of *Divine Institution* may be abolished, when they are abused to *Superstition*, surely such things as are Instituted neither by *Divine* nor *Humane Laws*, ought to be laid aside, when they give just occasion of Scandal to the *Godly*, and supplant *Religion* and *Vertue*. I am sure none can say that our Plays are otherwise: That they jostle out *Religion* and keep alive the Seeds of *Vice*, is most certain; and that the Theatres are the Temples of *Vice*, on whose Altars the *Idolatrous Votaries* do offer Incense to *Beelzebub*: Examine strictly the *Lives* and *Conversations* of such as frequent Plays, and see how seldom they go to Church, and how often to the Theatre; and then conclude which has had the greatest share of their *Devotion?* But suppose they give their constant Attendance at Church, it is surely an ill Preparation for the *Lords-Day*, to see a Play on the *Saturday* Evening; do they th prepare their Hearts to seek the Lord, to approa the Presence of him, who will be had in Reverea by all that come near him?

I shall conclude my Discourse at this Ti with reading you some of the Thoughts of t *Ingenious* and *Learned* Mr. *Collier*, on this Subj in his *Dissuasive from the Play-House*. Page 11. H says. *The Play-House has been look'd on as a* Publi *Nusance, Censur'd and Discountenanc'd in* Chur *and State, and that in Times both Ancient and M dern. The Republick of* Rome, *before* Julius Cæ *stopt the Building the Theatre, being fully convinc that this Diversion would bring in Foreign Vice, th the Old* Roman *Vertue would be lost, and the Spiri of the People Emasculated. This Wise Nation ma the Function of Players Scandalous, seiz'd their Fr dons, and threw them out of Priviledge and Re tation.*

Page 12. *To come down to our own Constitution; the Players are bidden to Act, and scatter their Reflections thro' the Kingdom, u der very Severe and Infamous Penalties, and in the Reign of the f mous Queen* Elizabeth, *there was an Order of Queen and Council, drive the Players out of the City and Liberties of* London, *and pull down the Theatres, which was Executed accordingly.* 39. El Cap. 4. 1. Jac. Cap. 7. *In* France *some Years since the Ita Players were Expelled the Kingdom, and now the* French *Stage under Excommunication. The Theatres have been lately shut up Italy by the* Pope, *and in the Territories of* Brandenburgh *by t King of* Pruffia. *And several* European *Countries would never dure them in any Form, or under any* Regulation.

Certainly we in *England* have the greatest Reasons of any N tion in *Europe* to lay a Total Restraint on the Stage; ours, many Years, has been a Land of Light; we believe our selv to be the most Reformed of any *Protestant Churches*, and o Clergy would be Angry, should they be told, they are *Hete dox*, even in Circumstantials; but how can we keep up the Ch racter we have given our selves, and which is received of throughout the whole *Protestant World*, if we let the *Papists* before us in pulling down the Tabernacles of *Unrighteous* Shall the *Idolatrous Papists* endeavour to Deprecate the Ju ments of God by a prohibition of Plays, and shall we, who ha so lately felt the Effects of his sore Displeasure, give them t least Countenance! Is not *Vice* and *Prophaness* among us, *Remora* to all our Undertakings, that puts both the *Earth* a *Sea* in so violent Convulsions, when the Land discharges it s of its Burden, and the *Sea* tosses back our *Ships*, like so ma Balls of *Fortune*, some into the *Hazard*, and the others rec under the weight of *Iniquity?* When the *Sea* shall give up h Dead, will not our Drowned Sailors say, that they were E amples of Divine Displeasure, because we refused to be Refo med; and tho' the Judgments of God were so visible among us, yet we would not Learn Righteousness; but Indulg'd o selves in the Practice of those things that are so provoking the Divine Majesty?

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